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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine what specific activities parents use to develop language in prekindergarten, kindergarten and first and second grade children. A questionnaire about language related activities consisted of general information regarding the parents and children, followed by 15 statements that the parents checked according to the frequency with which the activity occurred at home. Four groups of parents were compared by occupation and education. It was found that verbal interaction activities were the most common type of parent-child language related activities, followed by activities that required learning tools and the prolonged attention of the parents. It was also found that families of professional and well-educated fathers interacted the least in language activities. (A copy of the questionnaire is appended.) (HTH)

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PARENTAL PARTICIPATION
IN
EARLY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement of the Masters of Arts
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1984

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In Dedication

to my parents, Joseph and Martha Parisi, for the confidence and encouragement they gave me throughout my education and to my husband, Tony, for all his love and support.

Abstract

A survey consisting of fifteen language related activities was taken in order to determine what activities parents most frequently participate in with their children in order to develop language. Four groups were compared by occupation and education. It was found that verbal interaction activities were the most common type of parent-child interaction related to language activities. This was followed by activities which require learning tools and the prolonged attention of the parent. It was also found that families of professional and well educated fathers interacted the least in language activities.

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PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

IN

EARLY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The positive relationship between language development and reading achievement is a common assumption among educators. Durkin in 1972 found that good readers use language effectively, and Wiig, Semel and Crouse in 1973 noted that language deficiency may contribute to reading disability.

By definition of Bond and Tinker, reading involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve a stimuli for recall of meaning which is acquired through past experience. This includes early receptive communication of non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expression to expressive language which is learned through interaction and responses with others. These experiences are determined by the parenting skills that the child is raised with since birth. Parenting skills vary and are not inherited but learned.

Parental nurturing is the prime factor which influences the physical, psychological and cognitive development of young children. All these being factors involved in language development. Lasky and Klopp in 1982 performed a study. It was found that there was a significant difference between specific language interactions performed by parents of normal and language=disordered children. These interactions included expansions, use of questions, answers, acknowledgements and providing information. This suggest that they type of activities parents offer their children may be of critical importance in their development of language.

The physical environment may be important to language growth. Wachs in 1982 found that excessive noise levels in an infant's household can have detrimental effects on normal development of some children. It was shown that high noise levels can delay progress of sensori-motor development within the first two years of growth. The effects of radio, television and home computer games should be considered during the early growth years.

Parents and teachers should be working together to foster experiences which would lead the child to successful learning. In an effort to determine the effects of parental involvement in language development, Beveridge and Jerrance in 1982 evaluated a study in Manchester, England on the Parental Assistance Plan. A group of nursery students were given different forms of language intervention, with the control receiving no formal instruction. The one experimental group which received special lessons from their parents showed an increase in language development which was sustained over an 18 month period. Parents were instructed in various forms of playing techniques such as reciting poetry, playing with color, sizes and shapes and frequent vocal interaction with the child. The study demonstrated many positive aspects of working with parents to show them effective parenting skills in relation to language development.

Communication between teachers and parents should be a major goal of education so that effective learning skills can be gained before the child's entry in school. Most parents are interested in their child's success, however lack the information they need to fully develop their child's potential. If we, as educators better understand the general background a child has grown with, we can be more effective in dealing with both parents and children.

The New Jersey Reading Association feels so strongly about educating parents that a booklet entitled "Bright Beginnings; Language and Reading with your Baby" was printed in 1982, in Spanish and English. This booklet gives activities and ideas for parents to use in interacting with their child and infant which help to develop language.

In order to establish effective and successful communication with parents and educators, we as educators should be aware of the trend in activities which the population we are working with use in the home to development language skills. From a survey assessment, it is possible to determine what aspects of a child's language development were strong and which were weak. It would also determine what parents feel were important and their interaction with their child.

HYPOTHESIS

Parents of young children do not use specific activities to develop language.

DEFINITIONS

Activity - any interaction between child and parent which in some way fosters language development.

Parent - bilogical, adoptive or legal guardians who are nurturing the child.

Young children - children between the ages of birth and seven years.

Language - a system of arbitrary oral symbols by means of which a social group interacts.

Language Development - that process by which language is acquired on a progressive basis.

ASSUMPTIONS

It is assumed that parents and young children interact on a daily basis from birth.

It is assumed that parents have some knowledge that language development comes through interaction.

It is assumed that parents will answer the questions as honestly as possible.

It is assumed that parents are interested in their child's development.

LIMITATIONS

A limitation of this study is the inability to randomly select and assign subjects.

A limitation of this study is that the data-gathering instrument has not been validated.

A limitation of this study is the limited variation in the population sampled.

DEL'MITATIONS

The conclusions of this study are restricted to the population of a private school in an urban area of New Jersey.

Procedures

A questionnaire of language related activities was developed to determine what specific, if any, activities parents use with their young children to foster language. The questionnaire consisted of general information regarding the parents and child. This was followed by fifteen statements which the parents checked according to the frequency which the activity occurred in the home. The questions were developed in relation to the studies of research used for this project, and were based on their scientific results.

A cover letter was sent to the teachers who would participate in this project requesting their cooperation and explaining the purpose of the study. The teachers were those from the Pre-Kindergarten, the Kindergarten, two First Grades and the Second Grade. This population was chosen to ensure recollection of family interaction during the first seven years of the child's growth.

Distribution of the cover letter to the parents requesting their participation and the questionnaire was distributed to the children. This was done at the end of the day and collected early in the morning. This procedure was used so the order of the classroom routine was not disturbed.

Tabulations were made of the number of responses given for each question according to a scale of :

Always = at every opportunity
Usually = once a day
Seldom = less than once a day
Never = less than once a week

The percentage of responses in each category of this scale was recorded for the total sample. Percentages were derived by dividing the number of responses by the total possible responses which could occurr.

Eight sets were formed and divided into four groups. Four sets were based on parental employment and four sets were based on parental educational attainment. Comparisons were based on:

1. The total percentage of positive responses of the total sample population for each of the fifteen questions.
2. The percentage of positive responses between families where both parents had either professional of non-professional occupations.
3. The percentage of positive responses between families where either the mother or father had a professional occupation.
4. The percentage of positive responses between families where both parents had either a high school education or extended education beyond high school.
5. The percentage of positive responses between families where either the mother or father had an extended education.
6. The percentage of positive responses between all eight sets of family variables.

The categories of "Always and Usually" were combined as a positive response, which indicated parent-child interaction of activity on a daily basis. The categories of "Seldom and Never" were combined as a negative response, indicating that the interaction occurred less than once a day or less than once a week.

Results

Table I indicates the percentage of responses which were given for each of the fifteen individual questions. The positive category consists of the "Always and Usually" category. The negative category consists of the "Seldom and Never" category. This was done due to the negligible difference in the frequency on which the answers were based.

The results of Table I indicate that 100% of the sample responded in the positive category to having spoken to their child since birth, as well as encouraging him to say the name of something he wants. Over 90% of the responses were in the positive category to the following activities: encouraging curiosity (92.1%), visiting new places (94.7%), informing the child of environmental occurrences (97.4%), allowing the child to assist the parent (92.1%) and using descriptive words (92.1%).

A slightly lower percentage, 89.5%, of the responses showed positive results in the area of reading to the child and discussing these stories and pictures, as well as encouraging extension of sentences.

A contradiction appears in regards to watching television and playing in a quiet area. While 86.8% of the responses indicate watching television as a usual activity, 84.2% indicate that playing quietly is also a common activity. The survey also indicates that a lesser amount of time is spent engaging playing games with the child. Games using sizes, shapes and colors totaled 76.4% and saying nursery rhymes totaled 73.7% of the responses. Only 52.7% utilize computer games in their household.

A total of 79.9% of the parents read articles or books related to child-rearing. This suggests that the majority of parents in this sample are interested in developing better parenting skills and information which would benefit their child's growth.

Table I

Percentage of Toral Responses for Individual Questions

Question	Positive Response	Negative Response
1. I have spoken to my chila since birth.	100 %	
2. I encourage my child's curiosity	92.1%	6.8%
3. I take my child with me to visit new places.	94.7%	5.2%
4. I give information to my child about new sights and sounds in his environment.	94.7%	5.2%
5. I am descriptive when I speak to my child (Get the big, red ball under the chair.).	92.1%	7.9%
6. I read to my child.	89.5%	10.5%
7. I discuss the stories and pictures with my child.	89.5%	7.9%
8. I play games with my child using colors, sizes, shapes etc.	76.4 %	23.7%*
9. I say nursery rhymes to my child.	73.7%	26.3%
10. I let my child help me do things.	92.1%	7.9%
11. I encourage my child to say the name of something he wants.	100 %	
12. I encourage my child to speak in longer sentences.	89.5%	10.5%
13. My child watches television.	86.8%	13.1%
14. My child plays with computer games (Speak and Spell, etc.).	52.7%	42 %*
15. My child has a quiet place to play and uses it.	84.2%	15.7%
Do you read books or articles related to child-rearing?	79.9%	21 %

* One respondent omitted an answer to this question.

Table II represents the total percentage of positive and negative responses for each of four sets of parents. Sets were based on professional or non-professional occupation of mothers and fathers. Comparisons were made between sets in each of 2 groups. Group I compares families where both parents are either professional or non-professional. In this group, more time appears to be spent in language development activities 7.8% more in those families where both parents are professional. 39.9% of the responses in the professional set were positive, while 82.1% were positive in the non-professional set.

Table II

Percentage of Total Positive and Negative Responses Based on Occupation

* Parent Occupation	Positive Responses	Negative Responses
Group I		
Mother and Father Professional	89.9%	10.6%
Mother and Father Non-Professional	82.1%	9.7%
Group 2		
Father Professional	79 %	21 %
Mother Professional	89 %	9 %

* Professional Occupations included: office workers, nurses, technicians, computer operators, teachers, sheriffs, attorneys, supervisors, financial analysts, chemists, salespersons and bank workers.

Non-Professional Occupations included: policemen, firemen, carpenters, plumbers, postal clerks, security guards, machinists, factory workers and warehouse workers.

In Group 2, which compares families where either the mother or father is professional, professional mothers responded positively 10% more than in those families where the father is employed in a professional occupation, (89%, 79% respectively.). This suggest sthat the type of occupation that the mother has appears to have some bearing on the frequency in which language development activities occurr in the home. While a large descrepency is not noted, some variation does occurr.

Table III

Percentage of Total Positive and Negative Responses Based on Education

* Parent Education	Positive Responses	Negative Responses
Group 1		
Mother and Father Extended Education	88.8%	10.9%
Mother and Father High School	90 %	9.1%
Group 2		
Father Extended Education	76.5%	17.5%
Mother Extended Education	89.5%	10 %

* Extended Education includes: credits beyond high school, business, technical, college, graduate.

Table III represents the total percentage of positive and negative responses of each of four sets of parents. Sets were based on educational attainment.

Group 1 compares responses of families where both parents have either a high school education or extended education beyond high school. It appears that little difference is noted between these sets of parents. Parents with high school showed 90% positive responses and parents with extended education showed 88.8%, a difference of 1.2%. This suggest that when both parents have similar educational attainment, the child received a high frequency of interaction with parents in language development activities on a daily basis.

Group 2, however, shows a 13.4% difference when either the mother or father has schooling beyond high school. Families where the mother has extended education have 89.9% positive responses, while families where the father has extended education have only 76.5% positive responses. It appears that when the father and not the mother has extended education, the interaction between parent and child occurrs less frequently in regards to language development activities in this sample.

In comparing the results from Table II and Table III, the results indicate that six of the eight sets gave over 80% positive responses. The sets which gave below 80% included those families where only the father had a professional occupation or extended education. When both parents had equal employment and education, more interaction was received by the child in language development activities.

The percentages utilized in Tables I, II, III, are derived by dividing the number of responses which were received for a given question or category, by the total responses which would be possible for each.

Conclusions and Implications

It can be concluded, from the results, that the majority of parents in this sample do interact in language development activities with their child on a daily basis. One third of the questions received over 90% positive responses. This indicates that the children in this sample receive encouragement and stimulation in a variety of language development activities. Verbal interactions are the most common. This kind of interaction permits the parent to speak to the child and meet other demands as well.

In the case of reading and discussing books, these activities are considered to be very beneficial to language development and positive attitudes toward reading. The results indicate that daily interaction between parent and child in these activities is frequent, as is noted by the 89.5% positive responses received. While this activity requires learning tools and the parent's full attention, it appears that it is a common occurrence.

Excluding story reading, it appears that those activities which require the most amount of prolonged concentration by the parent and the use of learning tools get the least amount of time for parent-child interaction. Games teaching sizes, shapes and colors or other concepts are not as frequently participated in. Although it should be noted, that a respectable amount of time is still utilized for this type of activity.

The implication here is for pre-school and kindergarten classes to continue to use and enhance the use of learning tools to build concept development, since their use in the home may be limited.

With 79.9% of the parents stating that they do read child-rearing books and articles, the opportunity does exist to inform parents and encourage more positive interaction with their child. Child growth and learning strategies can be distributed through school bulletins. Parent magazines and books need to offer a variety of specific activities which parents can do.

Since verbal interaction are most frequently generated, these kinds of activities can be stressed. While traveling, or during bathtime or chores, a parent can stimulate a child in many concepts if they have some ideas to use. Guessing games and categorization games offer the parent constructive ways to interact with their child while attending to other demands or passing time in a doctor's office for example. While many parents have less time to play games using learning tools, we can offer them various dieas for using the verbal interaction with their child to the fullest extent.

In regards to the results concerning the effect of parental employment and educatin, interestly, it appears that the least positive responses cam from those families where fathers are professional or have extended education. This may be a result of the limited time available for the child's interaction with both parents. This bypothesis needs further investigation before any conclusions can be drawn to that effect.

It can be concluded that the majority of families in this survey are involved in parent-child interaction in language development activities on a daily basis. Verbal interaction are most frequent and should be encouraged through parent literature. Pre-school and kindergarten classes should utilize many learning tools to develop concepts. Families where the father has professional employment or extended education interact less frequently than other groups surveyed. However, all groups had over 70% positive responses in participating in these language activities and demonstrates concern and involvement with their child in this important aspect of development.

RELATED RESEARCH

Language acquisition is a process which begins at birth through interaction with other individuals. The nature of the interactions is a determining factor in the successful development of language skills. Parents are the primary sources of the language foundation with which a child begins school. Physical as well as emotional and intellectual needs must also be met. It is essential that open communication is established between the home and school in order to insure that a child is well prepared for the task of learning when he enters school.

Durkin in 1982 defined listening vocabulary as "all the words that a person understands when another speaks to them." Experiential background is also an important factor. The discussion of occurrances in the child's world allows the child an opportunity to become aware of outside influences and increase experiential background. Beginning at birth, states Johnson and Smith in "Teaching Children to Read, 1980 the process of language acquisition occurs. This time period is the sole responsibility of the parent, with the exception of those children in day care or nursery schools.

The factor of interaction between parent and child was so important to Russo and Owens that in 1982 they developed an "Objective Observation Tool for Parent-Child Interaction". Video-taped samples of parent-child interactions were judged and categorized by activity and subjectivity and objectivity, so a tool for measuring would be completed. This included such activities as reinforcement, attending, gestures, imitations, expansions, naming and sentence completion. These were common yet important aspects of parent-child interaction and included verbal and non-verbal communication.

In the same, 1982, another study by Lasky and Klopp was performed which demonstrated the importance of similar activities. It was found that there was a significant difference between specific language interactions performed by parents of normal and language-disordered children. These interactions included expansions, use of questions and answers, acknowledgements and providing information.

This evidence indicated that specific activities used by parents can foster normal language abilities.

Many activities are suggested for the teacher of young children to develop language in their young students. Healy in 1982 stated that the two primary functions of the language process are listening and speaking and are often practiced less than the secondary ones of writing and reading. "Increasing our understanding of the sequential development of language is the first step in planning an effective language growth program. Modeling is an important factor and should be encouraged in the classroom." (Early Years, February 1982) Even more importantly, modeling is an effective means of teaching behavior at home.

In 1963 Smith examined conditions common to good readers. Some of these, as they related related to parental influence, were encouragement to read, books given as gifts, library usage and independent reading. Also similare were parental interests in schoolwork and PTA attendance. Parents who read to their children also semmed to keep a variety of literature around the house for themselves. They also allowed their children their own variety of literature to demonstrate that reading can open doors to enjoyable and interesting things. The positive attitudes and skills necessary for reaing are modeled to children and have an important impact on their language development and reaing success.

Modeling, therefore, when combined with an effective interaction activity can result in beneficail effects on the child. Specifically, some activites which foster language development have been established. These include many basic classroom procedures. Johnson and Smith in 1980 mentioned retelling of stories and conversational exchanges. Kirk, Kliebhan and Lerner in 1978 considered conversations, listening and responding and describing as productive activities in fostering language development. These routine classroom activities, when done with the parent would begin positive results at a critical point in language development; the first few years of a child's growth.

Physical factors are also important when working with the whole child. During infancy, when communication begins to develop, many factors can effect his growth. Denk-Glass, Laber and Brewer in 1982 state that even in "enriched environments" some children still demonstrate language deficiencies. Suspicion for one cause is related to otitis media, a severe ear infection. This study showed that there was some linkage between otitis media and language deficits. Considering the recurring nature of this problem, it can be assumed that different stages of language development can be interrupted.

Environmental factors have a physical effect on language development, under certain conditions. Wachs was quoted in 1982 as having found that excessive noise levels in an infant's household can have detrimental effect on normal development in some children. High noise levels can delay progress of sensori motor development throughout the first two years of life. Considering the overstimulation of auditory sound such as radio, television and computer games, it may be worth sharing this information with parents. Parents can easily remedy a condition such as this one.

Communication is needed between home and school in order for the child to benefit from the knowledge of both parents and teachers. Attitudes play an important role in the separation of these two factions. Weininger investigated the current attitude of the public on the educational system. Communication on both sides is important to fulfill the goals of parents and teachers. Increased progress of educational material is one reason for the difficulties. This does not allow parents to be adequately prepared to tutor their own children. Also noted was the barrage of noted experts who overwelm parents with new techniques, when, in most cases "traditional common sense" parenting works well for the majority of children.

Confusion over technique is combined with financial and time logistics. Parents become frustrated and unsure of how to raise their childre. Parents and teachers need to work together in order to develop a complete and effective language program.

One program which was based on cooperative communication between parent and teacher was done in Manchester, England in 1976 and was evaluated by Beveridge and Jerrams in 1978. This Parental Assistance Plan was based on the Renfrewshire Plan. This Parental Assistance Plan included dialogue and demonstrations which showed parents how to foster language in their child. The results demonstrated that not only was there a significant difference in pre and post tests, but the positive results were evident after eighteen months when re-tested. These children were those whose parents participated in the program and became aware of the various ways in which they could play or interact with their child and have a positive effect on their education. Parents also developed a more positive self-image, which improves the child's situation.

The New Jersey Reading Association has written a booklet entitled "Bright Beginnings: Language and Reading with your Baby", 1982. The purpose of this booklet was to educate parents in the area of language development. Activities were suggested to make constructive use of parent-child interactions. The goal of fostering good language ability is presented with activities such as reading, discussing pictures and stories and the use of conversation. Many of these are within the classroom curriculum and should also be found in the home.

Summary

The acquisition of language provides the foundation for future learning abilities. Parents play the most important role in developing language in their young children. As educators, we should encourage better communication with the. If knowledge

of cognitive development were combined with parental roles, children would start communication skills with a strong foundation. Information concerning physical, emotional and cognitive development would foster a most beneficial environment for the child to grow.

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APPENDIX

Dear Teachers,

I am a Graduate student in the Kean College Reading Department. My area of interest lies in the development of oral language. In order to determine what activities a child experiences in the home before he enters school, I have written a quesionnaire for parents.

I am not presently working in an elementary school, therefore, I am requesting your participation in this project. The questionnaire and cover letter need distribution and collection. This can be done at dismissal and arrival, so that valuable teaching time is not used. Manila envelopes will be available for easy collection.

The questionnaires will be distributed to you on Monday,. February 13 and collected on Thursday, February 16.

Your cooperation in this matter will be greatly appreciated. Any comments or suggestions from you would be welcomed.

Thank you for your time in this matter.

Sincerely,

Maria Romano

February 13, 1984

Dear Parents,

I am a Graduate student at Kean College doing research in the area of reading under the supervision of the Reading Department. It is my hope to gather information which may lead to the beneficial effects for children.

I am requesting your cooperation in this matter. Please complete the attached questionaire as accurately as possible. Please do not place your name on the questionnaire so that it can remain strictly anonymous. This information will be tabulated so a general survey can be made of the activities listed.

Please detach this cover letter and return the completed questionnaire to your child's teacher by Thursday, February 16.

Thank you for your time and cooperation in this matter. It is greatly appreciated. If you have any comments that you would like to add, please write them on the back of the questionnaire. Thank you again,

Sincerely,

Maria Romano

Maria Romano
Graduate Student

PARENT QUESTIONAIRE

Child's Age _____ Child's Grade _____ M ___ F ___ Language spoken at home _____

Mother's Age _____ Mother's occupation _____ Mother's Education _____

Father's Age _____ Father's occupation _____ Father's Education _____

Please check the box that most accurately tells how often you or your spouse engage in these activities with your child or children. Questions 1-11 relate to your child from birth. Questions 12-15 relate to your child since she/he began speaking.

A= Always = at every opportunity
U= Usually = daily
S= Seldom = less than once a day
N= Never = less than once a week

Activity	A	U	S	N
1. I have spoken to my child since birth.				
2. I encourage my child's curiosity.				
3. I take my child out with me to visit new places.				
4. I give information to my child about new sights and sounds in his environment.				
5. I am descriptive when I speak to my child (Get the big, red ball under the chair.).				
6. I read to my child.				
7. I discuss the stories and pictures with my child.				
8. I play games with my child using colors, sizes, shapes etc.				
9. I say nursery rhymes to my child.				
10. I let my child help me do things.				
11. I encourage my child to say the name of something he wants.				
12. I encourage my child to speak in longer sentences.				
13. My child watches television.				
14. My child plays with computer games (Speak and Spell, etc.)				
15. My child has a quiet place to play and uses it.				

Have you read the booklet "Bright Beginnings" by the NJRA? yes ___ no ___

Do you read books or articles related to child-rearing? yes ___ no ___

Thank you!